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NASIS

NEBRASKANS AND THEIR LOCAL GOVERNMENT

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NEBRASKA ANNUAL SOCIAL INDICATORS SURVEY

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NASIS-80 #4

NEBRASKANS AND THEIR LOCAL GOVERNMENT

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Price: .75

The Nebraska Annual Social Indicators Survey

Lynn K. White - 1980 Study Director

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The interview averaged approximately 45 minutes and included questions about environment, health, crime, political attitudes, occupation, education, family life, and other matters reflecting the quality of life experienced in the state. For the entire sample, the chances are 95 in 100 that the true value for the population lies within a range equal to the reported survey percentage plus or minus 2.3 percent. This is an estimate of maximum error and for most items the percentages are likely to be even more accurate.

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NEBRASKANS AND THEIR LOCAL GOVERNMENT

Susan Welch
Alan Booth

In the past several years we have reported on Nebraskan's attitudes toward their state legislature and state government.* This year, we felt it appropriate to examine some aspects of the relationships Nebraskans have with their local governments. In this report we will look at two elements of that relationship: frequency with which Nebraskans participate in some local government activities; and how positively or negatively Nebraskans evaluate their local government.

The information that forms the basis of this report was gathered in the Spring 1980 Nebraska Annual Social Indicators Survey. This was a statewide telephone survey of 1916 randomly selected Nebraska residents. The findings from the survey are accurate to approximately two percent.

PARTICIPATION IN LOCAL GOVERNMENT

We chose two kinds of activities to examine; both go beyond simply voting, but yet do not require strenuous or extremely time-consuming activity on the part of the citizen. We asked Nebraskans if they had attended a school board meeting or attended a city council meeting within the past two years. The results are shown in Table 1. Overall 13 percent of our sample had attended a school board meeting and an equal number had attended a city council meeting. Table 1 indicates that participation varied depending on the individual's age, education, income and the size of the community of residence. Participation in city council meetings tended to be more frequent in the smaller and medium sized towns than in Lincoln or Omaha.

This differential participation is to be anticipated. Not only is

* *See "Tax Supported Income Supplements and Nebraska's Poor," 1977; "Nebraskans and Their Political Participation," 1977; "More for Less: Nebraskans and State Government Programs," 1978; and "Nebraskans' Evaluations of Their State Government," 1979.

getting to a council meeting more of an effort in big towns, but probably in small towns more issues are likely to be of consequence to the individual; that is, in a very small town or village, an issue affecting one neighborhood essentially affects the whole community in a way that it does not in a larger community. Attendance at school board meetings also reflects this pattern: residents of larger communities attend less often than those in smaller ones.

Age also determines participation, to a certain extent. Those in the 35-59 year-old age group are more than twice as likely to attend council meetings as older citizens and four times as likely to attend school board meetings. Of course, this is the age group most likely to have children in school. This middle age group is also more likely to attend council and school board meetings than the younger citizens, though the differences are not so large.

As in every other form of political participation in the U.S., those with more formal education tend to participate more than those with medium or low educations. Here, for example, those with college degrees are 3-5 times more likely to turnout for council and school board meetings than those who did not finish high school. College graduates are about twice as likely as high school graduates to attend such meetings. These differences are also reflected in income: the greater one's income, the more likely one is to attend school board and council meetings. Thus, on the local scene, just as on the state and national one, upper income, well-educated people are more active than those with less income and education.

Differences among people of different party loyalties are insignif-

icant in terms of these measures of participation in local activities. Likewise, few differences were found among those with different views toward state government and taxes.

RATINGS OF LOCAL GOVERNMENT

We now turn from whether individuals participate in local government by attending meetings of local governing bodies to the question of how favorably or unfavorably Nebraskans rate the services their local governments provide. We asked four questions to assess ratings of local government: we asked for an overall evaluation of local government, an evaluation of local fire protection, of local police protection, and of street maintenance. These particular services are ones provided by most communities, from very small to the largest. The results are shown in Table 2. Overall, slightly over half, 55 percent, of Nebraskans rated their local government as good or excellent. Turning to an evaluation of individual services, however, 93 percent rated their fire protection good or excellent, 71 percent so rated their police protection, but only 47 percent so rated their street maintenance (Table 2).

The variations in these ratings among respondents from different sized communities are quite interesting. The overall evaluations of local government do not vary too much. Although Omaha is noticeably on the low end of the scale and Lincoln and communities of size 500-5000 are on the high end, only 14 percentage points separate Omaha from the highest ranking communities. Similarly, there is not a lot of variation in ratings of fire protection, although ratings tend to be somewhat higher in cities over 500 as compared with the very tiniest

towns and people living in the open country.

Substantial variation occurs in ratings of police protection. Lincoln rates higher than any other sized community with Omaha coming in second. Both Lincoln and Omaha residents are positive toward their police protection. In Lincoln, 87 percent rated their protection good or excellent; while Omaha residents did not give quite such glowing ratings, another indicator (not reported in Table 2) showed that they were more likely than any other group to report that crime was decreasing in their neighborhoods. On the other end of the scale, those in small communities are much less happy with their police protection: only 46 percent of residents of towns of 500 and under rate their police protection that well, and only 64 percent of those living in the open country rate their police protection highly. Further, residents of towns 500-1500 are also not pleased with their police protection. In these communities, people probably rely largely on county law enforcement or on very small one or two person departments. So few people cannot provide the same range of service as larger departments.

Street maintenance satisfaction presents yet another pattern. Here, the residents of middle-sized communities are slightly more favorable than either the smaller or the larger communities, but Omaha residents are much less happy than residents in any other sized community: only 33 percent of Omaha residents rate their street maintenance good or excellent. Residents of Lincoln rate their street maintenance slightly higher than the average Nebraskan does.

In sum, while the old saw about government closest to the people being best may be true, it seems that the very small governments closest

to the people are not the most higly rated. Lincoln, overall, receives the highest ratings of any size city group. Residents of the very smallest towns seem the most unhappy with specific local services, particularly fire and police, where their ratings are quite a bit below the mean.

Individual respondent characteristics are not as strongly related to these attitudes as are community characteristics. Unlike our findings concerning participation in evaluating government, the low and high income residents and the well and less well-educated do not differ much. In general, older people tend to give slightly higher ratings than younger people; this is particularly true in the overall evaluations and the evaluation of street maintenance services.

Republicans tend to give slightly higher rankings to local government than Democrats or Independents, but these differences are slight. It appears that citizens who are unhappy with their state legislature also tend to be the most unhappy with local government; in fact the differences are quite striking. This, therefore, may indicate that some people have a generalized "nay saying" or "yea saying" perspective toward government that reflects more their own beliefs about the effectiveness of government than it does the actions of the government. Somewhat surprisingly, differences in evaluation of local government are not related to level of participation as measured by our indicators of attendance at school board and council meetings. Attenders are just as likely to give local government a positive rating as non-attenders.

CONCLUSIONS

We have examined a few aspects of citizens' relationships with their local government in Nebraska. We found that few Nebraskans took an active part in local government. Though admittedly our measures only tap a part of possible participation, our findings are similar to those of other studies showing limited participation in most kinds of local government activities. As is true in other forms of participation, those who have greater education and income participate more. Those in the middle age group also participate more, as do those in smaller communities. In regard to community size, it may be that the focus of participation in larger communities is in neighborhood activities and groups, rather than directly with the council or school board. In small towns there may be less need for mediating groups between the individual and his or her government, while in larger towns people may feel the need to organize to present a case.

Turning from activity to evaluation, local governments get rather modest evaluations. Only slightly more citizens rate local governments as good or excellent as rate them fair or poor. Lincoln comes off best in this overall evaluation, and Omaha worst, with the middle and smaller sized towns in between. However, in rating specific services, those from the very smallest towns are least satisfied with police and fire services, perhaps reflecting the reality of more limited services to the unincorporated areas and farm dwellers. Those from the smallest towns are as satisfied as residents of larger towns with their street maintenance, however. For that service, Omahans are by far the least happy.

Overall, it appears that the middle sized and large communities are meeting the perceived needs of the citizens quite well in the areas of fire and police services, less well in the areas of street maintenance. Why citizen's evaluation of local services appears to be higher than their general evaluation of local government is an interesting question. Perhaps citizens remember what they are dissatisfied with more than what they are satisfied with. Also, it is possible that they are dissatisfied with services that we did not ask about--education or housing, and so forth. Finally, it may be that citizens simply expect government to do more and at less cost than it does, without really having any specific ideas about how that might be accomplished.

TABLE 1. CHARACTERISTICS OF PEOPLE WHO ATTENDED CITY COUNCIL OR SCHOOL BOARD MEETINGS WITHIN LAST TWO YEARS.

	Percent who attended city council meeting	Percent who attended school board meeting
Overall	13	13
Size of Community:		
Open country	11	23
500 and under	16	21
501-1500	17	13
1501-5000	19	12
5001-40,000	18	10
Lincoln	7	7
Omaha	8	10
Age:		
18-34	12	12
35-59	18	21
60 +	8	5
Educational Attainment:		
Did not finish high school	8	6
High school diploma	12	12
Junior or community college degree	19	16
Bachelor's degree	19	24
Post graduate degree	29	35
Income:		
Less than $7,500	5	6
$7,500 - $14,999	11	12
$15,000 - $24,999	17	16
$25,000 +	21	20
Party Preference:		
Republican	13	15
Democrat	14	12
Independent	14	13
No preference	8	6

TABLE 2. CHARACTERISTICS OF PEOPLE WHO RATE THEIR LOCAL GOVERNMENT EXCELLENT OR GOOD

	Percent Rating Local Government Excellent or Good	Percent Rating Fire Protection Excellent or Good	Percent Rating Police Protection Excellent or Good	Percent Rating Street Maintenance Excellent or Good
Overall:	55	93	71	47
Size of Community:				
Open country	56	89	64	47
500 and under	57	83	46	49
501-1,500	60	97	61	58
1,501-5,000	62	98	73	59
5,001-40,000	51	93	72	50
Lincoln	62	96	87	51
Omaha	48	93	80	33
Age:				
18-34	50	91	70	39
35-39	55	93	69	47
60 +	59	96	77	61
Educational Attainment:				
Did not finish high school	51	91	70	51
High school diploma	55	93	72	46
Junior or community college degree	49	92	62	48
Bachelor's degree	60	95	77	46
Post graduate degree	60	93	75	43
Income:				
Less than $7,500	52	94	72	52
$7,500 - $14,999	52	92	68	43
$15,000 - $24,999	55	94	72	45
$25,000 +	60	93	75	48
Party Preference:				
Republican	57	94	74	50
Democrat	53	92	73	48
Independent	53	92	67	43
No preference	50	91	69	43
Rating of State Legislature:				
Satisfied	64	94	75	51
Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied	48	91	65	40
Dissatisfied	35	91	68	40

TABLE 2. CHARACTERISTICS OF PEOPLE WHO RATE THEIR LOCAL GOVERNMENT EXCELLENT OR GOOD
(continued)

	Percent Rating Local Government Excellent or Good	Percent Rating Fire Protection Excellent or Good	Percent Rating Police Protection Excellent or Good	Percent Rating Street Maintenance Excellent or Good
Participating in Local Government:				
Attended city council meeting	53	92	69	49
Did not attend city council meeting	55	93	72	47
Attended school board meeting	51	90	67	42
Did not attend school board meeting	55	93	72	48

List of reports already released using data gathered in the 1980 Nebraska Annual Social Indicators Survey. These may be purchased at the indicated price from the Bureau of Sociological Research of the University of Nebraska-Lincoln.

Report Number	Title
1.	Designs, Procedures, Instruments and Forms for the 1980 NASIS. Lynn K. White. Price: $7.50.
2.	Status of Women in Nebraska. Susan Welch and Alan Booth. Price: $1.00.
3.	Congressional District and Planning Region Databook for the State of Nebraska. Lynn K. White. Price: $1.50.

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Migration in Nebraska

Movers and Stayers

Between 1870 and 1890, thousands of immigrants increased the size of the white population of Nebraska by more than 800 percent. Many of these newcomers were unprepared for the rigors of the Plains, however, and harsh weather, drought, grasshoppers, and other natural disasters reduced the in-flow to a trickle such that by the 1890's Nebraska was already experiencing substantial out-migration. This trend continued for the next 80 years: during each decade between 1890 and 1970, Nebraska lost more people to migration than it gained. Because of relatively high birth rates, however, the population of Nebraska did not actually decline in the decades following 1890 (except during the disasterous decade of the thirties), but has grown much more slowly than the nation as a whole.

A second pattern of migration, also critical in shaping Nebraska's population was the trend toward urban movement. While Nebraska's initial settlement was almost entirely rural, in subsequent decades the rural population declined, both in absolute number and as a proportion of the total population.

Thus, migration has played a critical role in Nebraska's history, a role that is increasingly important in more recent decades. The old rural-urban differences in fertility and mortality have virtually disappeared and migration is by far the major determinant of differential growth of communities. More important perhaps is the fact that migration is always selective, never a random selection of the population. For a

variety of reasons communities need to know the kinds of people who are leaving or entering their area: the young or the old? the employed or the unemployed? the well or the poorly educated?

In this report, data from the Nebraska Annual Social Indicators Surveys are used to answer these questions. We are concerned with the extent of migration among Nebraska's population, especially the people who leave the state, but also the direction and amount of movement within the state. In addition to documenting the patterns of migration, we are also interested in the factors that lead to migration and the effects of migration on the community.

Study Design

In 1977 the Nebraska Annual Social Indicators Survey interviewed a random sample of 1867 adults in the state of Nebraska. In 1979, we re-interviewed 1623 or 87 percent of the original sample. The other 13 percent either refused a second interview, were unable to complete the interview (ill, overseas), or died.

Data from these two surveys are used to measure the amount of migration that occurred among a random sample of Nebraskans in the two-year period between 1977 and 1979. The design of the survey enables comparisons between migrants and non-migrants during this time period. By the nature of the data, it is not possible to examine the characteristics of individuals who entered Nebraska during this period, but we give special attention to the 1977 Nebraska residents who subsequently left the state.

The Findings

Level of Migration

In the two years between Spring 1977 and Spring 1979, over one-quarter of the respondents in our survey changed residences. While the bulk of these people merely changed homes within the same county, 4.3 percent of the respondents moved to a different county in Nebraska and 6.7 percent left the state entirely.

TABLE 1. LEVELS OF MIGRATION, NEBRASKA 1977-79 AND THE UNITED STATES, 1975-79.

	Nebraska, 1977-79		United States, 1975-79*	
	Percent	Number	Percent	Number (in 1000's)
Non-mover	73.4%	1190	58.3%	115,598
Movers:				
Within same county	15.5	252	23.2	47,168
Other county in same state	4.3	71	9.0	18,220
Other state	6.7	107	9.6	19,451
Total	99.9	1620	100.1	203,437

*U.S. Bureau of Census, Current Population Report, Series P-20, No. 350, "Population Profile of the U.S., 1979." GPO:WDC, May 1980.

These figures can best be put in perspective by comparing them to national or regional data for a comparable period of time. The data for an exact comparison are not available, but Table 1 includes the best approximation available: nationwide data on movement in the four-year period between 1975-79. While the longer period naturally shows a larger proportion having changed residences, the destination of movers is comparable. In the national sample, 23 percent of the movers changed to a different state; in the Nebraska sample, 25 percent left the state.

This suggests that the rate of leaving Nebraska is close to the national average--not the major exodus of previous decades. In fact, the last Census data for Nebraska, 1970-77, showed that there were slightly more people moving into Nebraska than moving out of it in the seventies.*

Who Stays and Who Moves?

To a large extent, who moves is as important as how many move. The 1977 baseline survey gives detailed information about both movers and stayers in 1977 and can be used to show which characteristics best predict moving.

A chief characteristic of movers rather than stayers is their age: the older one is, the less likely one is to move. While only 46 percent of the under-30 respondents lived in the same residence over this two-year period, 92 percent of the over-50 people stayed (see Table 2). Note, however, that the destinations of movers are not all that different for these three age groups. The older group is most likely to remain within the same county, but is almost as likely to leave the state as the very youngest group. The middle-aged group, those most likely to be affected by career considerations, are much more likely to leave the state than the younger or older groups.

*U.S. Statistical Abstract, 1979, Table 12, "Components of Population Change--States, 1960-70, 1970-77." GPO:WDC.

TABLE 2. MOVING STATUS BY AGE.

	TOTAL		MOVERS BY DESTINATION			
Age	Number	Percent Non-movers	Percent Within County	Percent Other Nebraska	Percent Out-of-State	Total
18-30	507	46	59	19	22	100%
31-50	506	76	53	13	34	100%
51 +	607	92	71	10	18	100%

This association between age and migration is a natural accompaniment to life cycle changes: moving away from home, buying a first house, moving with one's job, getting a bigger or smaller house as one's family demands change. These processes converge to make age probably the best single predictor of movement--locally, nationally, or even internationally. In order to examine the other characteristics of migrants independent of the age factor, the other tables in this report statistically control for the respondent's age.

In the next table we describe the relationship between three kinds of factors on the probability of moving: community and neighborhood characteristics, respondents' relationship to the community, and respondents' own characteristics. This analysis demonstrates again that movers are far from a random selection of the population.

The first set of factors in Table 3 indicates that community size and neighborhood do have an effect on likelihood of moving. The relationship between community size and moving is not a simple one: while farm populations are, as expected, the least likely to move, residents of very small rather than big cities are most apt to move. In terms of neighborhoods,

there is a strong relationship between moving and neighborhood upkeep: people in run down neighborhoods are twice as likely to have moved as people who live in well kept up areas.

In terms of the respondents' relationship with community, there are strong associations between ties with the community and moving. People who have lived in the community less than 5 years, who have few or no friends and relatives in the community, and who rent their homes are much more likely to move. Independent of age, people who have purchased a home or who have lived in a community for a long time are likely to have stayed, not only in the same community, but in the same house.

TABLE 3. CHARACTERISTICS OF MOVERS AND STAYERS, NEBRASKA 1977-79, CONTROLLING FOR AGE OF RESPONDENT.

	1977-1979		
	Stayers	Movers	Number
TOTAL	73	27	1620
COMMUNITY/NEIGHBORHOOD CHARACTERISTICS, 1977			
Kind of Community:			
Rural farm	83	17	246
Rural nonfarm	74	26	321
City less than 50,000	68	32	493
Lincoln	70	30	168
Omaha	73	27	392
Condition of Neighborhood:			
Very well kept up	77	23	842
Fairly well kept up	72	28	682
Not well kept up	58	42	82
RESPONDENT'S RELATIONSHIP WITH THE COMMUNITY, 1977			
Length of Residence in Community:			
0-5 years	60	40	385
6-15 years	75	25	286
16 + years	78	22	949
Number of Friends and Relatives in Community:			
0	67	33	163
1-3	72	28	347
4-6	71	29	363
7 or more	76	24	747
Home Ownership:			
Own or buying	81	19	1187
Rent	51	49	419

TABLE 3. CHARACTERISTICS OF MOVERS AND STAYERS, NEBRASKA 1977-79, CONTROLLING FOR AGE OF RESPONDENT.
(continued)

	Stayers	Movers	Number
CHARACTERISTICS OF RESPONDENT			
Liking of Neighborhood:			
Very much	78	22	1141
Somewhat	64	36	382
Not much	53	47	89
Evaluation of Neighbors:			
Very good	79	21	912
Fairly good	70	30	519
Not good	57	43	142
Satisfaction with Home:			
Very satisfied	77	23	788
Satisfied	71	29	656
Not satisfied	62	38	167
Family Income:			
Less than $10,000	64	36	463
$10,000-19,999	74	26	569
$20,000 or more	80	20	312
Respondent's Education:			
11 years or less	64	36	336
12 years	78	22	626
13-15 years	74	26	398
16 + years	72	28	260
Family Type:			
Husband-wife, kids	83	17	722
Husband-wife only	70	30	441
Other	61	39	457